Music

Sonny and Cher return

"Ah, that first big hit! Nothing like that 'big one' to get the audience on its feet, slobbering like Pavlovian dogs..."

A nostalgia trip! I would be whisked back in time to the days of my youth--'65, '66, and '67--before the days of death by drugs, death by draft, and death by starvation.

Ah, those were halcyon days. Nothing was real except the Beatles and Weejuns worn without socks and cruising the parking lot at the nearest Hardee's and getting out of high school. With college, I was years away from the draft, the "real" world, and the "sad facts of life."

Sometimes during this era, I heard Sonny and Cher Bono sing "I've Got You, Babe," and I realized that a new type of music--indeed, a new lifestyle--existed somewhere.

Remember how freaky they looked then? Cher dressed like a poor girl of the streets--old jeans and "poor boy" shirts which revealed a nice streak of bronze flesh from just below the breasts to just above the navel. Her long, black hair draped down her back, giving her a gaunt, emaciated look.

And what about Sonny? He was a far-out dude with his long hair and sideburns and moustache. He wore some really kinky clothes too--looking like the neighborhood rummage sale had furnished his wardrobe. He looked a little dirty, and he scared parents to death.

But Sonny and Cher always smiled and they always seemed to be so much "in love". They had each other; to hell with the rest.

Cher kept a hit single in the AM charts. "Alfie", "Bang! Bang!", and "Little Man" made her the undisputable queen of music in those days before Joplin and Slick.

And Sonny was so damned cool. To be married to that beautiful Cher would require a lot of cool. "He's so weird looking he's almost cute," my mother used to say.

From the love songs, they moved into their "biggie"--"And the Beat Goes On." This song painted a horrible picture for the children of the New Frontier. It confronted youth with the atrocities of war, the stupidity of bigotry, and a world of corruption. And, even worse, it said that we couldn't do one thing to stop it--because the beat goes on.

There were two films--both commercial and artistic failures--and a night club act. Then, in the summer of 1971, CBS let the duo host a television show during the rerun season. They made a big hit--coming back on in January, 1972, with a regular weekly show.

I hadn't seen the television show. But I was ready for Sonny and Cher. I had a date with my past on June 5 in the Carolina Coliseum when the show rolled into town.

One of the first problems to arise--speaking quite personally--was meeting the rest of the audience. I was amazed, for sitting all around me were the very same people who had once ridiculed my two heroes, I'd never be able to relieve those days of pleasure in a gymnasium full of 30- to 40-year-olds. The horror and irony of the whole scene was just too much.

The second comedown was an orchestra -- decked out in tuxedos -- warming up for the big concert. A couple of guitars and a tamborine would have been just fine. Why all this fancy stuff?

Then, a third bummer! I was going to have to sit through some comedian before seeing my teen idols. I was "put-off" when

Cher

David Brimmer, a young comic, leaped to the stage.

What kind of stuff is this clunker going to throw at us? I almost panicked.

But Brimmer was quite good. Without ever saying a 'no-no", the young performer pulled off some of the most "adult" humor ever heard in these parts. Somehow, even in the darkest recess of my mind, I couldn't imagine 10,000-plus Columbians laughing out loud at "risque" bathroom jokes, or stories about such evils as pre-marital sex and being horny.

I mean, here's the old batting averages. Columbians go ga-ga over people like Andy Williams, the Osmonds, and Henry Mancini--nice wholesome acts. So, I naturally figure that a man who tells dirty jokes to a mixed audience is a sure candidate for a tar-and-feathering and a one-way ticket out of town.

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After the intermission, the two stars were introduced.

Cher came on like a flash--dressed in an out-of-sight gown with her hair in an Afro, she made me understand anew why I had bought all those albums and listened to her constantly. She was a classy, sexy chick who had an exceptional voice.

Sonny, however, had undergone some startling changes--or, rather, failed to undergo some startling changes. His hair had't grown an inch since the late sixties. In fact, it was much neater. The shocker was his tux. Stripped of his "kook" image, Sonny looked like just another businessman in a grey flannel suit.

The Bonos immediately jumped into a rousing version of "All I Ever Need Is You." The old familiar harmony was there but it sounded different with the orchestra. Cher carried the song with her dynamic voice, and Sonny croaked in at just the right times. It was a professional job--very slick, very controlled.

After this first number, what seemed to be a fight between the two developed, centering around certain of Sonny's failings. Cher proved herself a clever comedienne--flipping out lines with great ease. A war between the sexes was declared.

It was about this time that I had the first inkling of what was to come. I realized that the duo would set me off on a nostalgia trip. But the images they were conjuring up were from my mother's childhood--back there in the mid-thirties.

Picture, if you can, the indefatiguable Mae West lodged in her plushest budoir, wearing her most provocative gown, and she is sharpening her notorious wit with her worst leading man.

Now, imagine West throws out a really naughy line--something really "purple" like, " a hard man is good to find." Now imagine her leading man answering this with, "Gosh, gee, really, baby?"

Well, that's basically what happened. Cher humorously attacked her hubby, accusing him of the following "crimes": impotency, sexual neglect, cuckoldry, being Italian, being untalented, and being a crashing bore.

She was right on nearly all counts. Unfortunately, her charges also sum up several of their problems as entertainers.

When the two breezed their way through "And the Beat Goes On", I knew my dreams were going to be hurt. Substituting an orchestra for the original guitar and "band-sound" gutted the song of any revolutionary fervor it once contained. The words became meaningless as the two moved around the stage singing the song a bit slower than it deserved. The beat had slowed down for a rest.

From there, they jumped into "United We Stand"--a rip-off performance of a rip-off song. Sure, the sentiment is good, but the words are hackneyed and the sound commercial.

After that, more banter. If Sonny had gagged himself and stood in the middle of the stage allowing Cher to insult him, I would have been at her side supplying her with ammo. Every time he opened his mouth, a maudlin sentiment sprang forth. He did make a good straight man for Cher's insults and jokes. Cher, from behind her Mae West image, kept her end of the dribble coming at a fast clip. She was terse, "rude" and seemed truly bored with hubby.

Finally, Sonny left the stage. Cher almost redeemed the whole show by belting out "Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves" and "You've Got A Friend" and rekindling some of that old spirit I had remembered so warmly. She possesses a fine sense of drama which--coupled with good lighting and provocative movement--added a spark of sincerity to her work.

Sonny returned decked out in a sequined jumpsuit, ready to do a solo number. But, again, he insisted on talking--relating the plot behind his solo as if anyone couldn't have guessed what it was about.

His solo--"You'd Better Sit Down, Kids"--is a good song. A father tries to explain to his children that he is divorcing his wife. Vocally, Sonny was quite good, except he had already destroyed the song's dramatic impact by his trite little intro.

Cher reappeared wearing a white gown with her hair draped down her back like in the old days. The two jumped into "A Cowboy's Work Is Never Done"--their big hit in the AM charts. Some fancy guitar work dressed up the song--at least making it sound different from the other stuff they'd sung. Their vocals and harmonizing were perfect.

Then followed the ultimate bummer. Sonny, at his maudlin best, told of his and Cher's struggling days when they had to wear weird clothes because they couldn't afford any better. And how they were starving to death because they couldn't buy food. And how they scraped together $80 to buy a piano so Sonny could write songs.

"And, gosh, gee, you know," shuffled Sonny, "I just wrote down our philosophy in a song..." and we sold a million copies of it.

Ah, that first big hit! Nothing like that "big one" to get the audience on its feet, slobbering like Pavlovian dogs.

What followed is best described as a bastard rendition of a very pleasant song called "I've Got You, Babe"--a song made famous in the mid-sixties by two freaky-looking kids named Sonny and Cher.

The lyrics hadn't changed a bit. Again, the orchestra destroyed remembrances of the original--smoothing out the the underlying primitiveness which had helped make the original such a hit. Again, the beat was slowed to a "swing" sound.

I wanted to cry. My teen-age heroes had sold out. They wore fancy clothes and told "daring" jokes for "swingers" and acted out roles from "adult" farces.

But, the worst horror was that they had managed to destroy any picture I had of them from those youthful days. They had wiped out any traces of beauty I had once found in their sound.

Sadly, I left the Coliseum feeling that I had, once again, been taken for a ride. Gone were the idealistic kids who had pulled me through some crucial years with their music. In their place were a shrewish vamp and an apologetic moron who, in their re-rush to the top, had prostituted themselves and their talent.

michael smith

State hospital

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five buildings...moving a guy from here to here, and another guy from here to here, so that you can have a vacancy to send a patient from here to here.

DAVE: Well, let's just look at the wards in Remotivation II...you've got one ward where they send all the "badasses"...the ones who give you a lot of problems...I'm on a treatment team for the readmissions ward and if someone runs away a lot, gets in a lot of fights, or just creates a lot of problems, that's where you send them...it's really ungodly over there...the aides scream and yell at the patients, jerk them around, that sort of thing...because they think its supposed to be a violent hot spot. The other places in Remotivation II are like the Preston Building, where most of the patients are old, and then the Gibbes Building, where most of them are old...

RON: Older..

OS: What's a treatment team?

DAVE: A treatment team's composed of a psychologist, a representative from Vocational Rehabilitation, a social worker, someone from activity therapy, and a nurse...that's about it...we see the patient; we talk to him; we decide where in the hospital he should go...what would be good for him to do...that sort of thing.

RON: You see, in Remotivation II, the whole section...the whole idea is just to keep the patients alive, you know...just to keep them there...you give them their medicine three or four times a day, and you feed them, and you put them to bed, and that's it...there's no planned activity. They have t.v.'s on the ward...when I first started working at Gibbs, they had a t.v. that had no picture, all it had was sound...the patients would sit in the dayroom and listen to the sound...I had to raise hell for about four months before I finally got them to get a working t.v.

OS: No picture?

RON: No...and that's all the patients do...watch t.v. There's two dayrooms on the ward; the ones in better contact go up to the front part...the ones in worse contact go to the back. The ones up at the front...all they had was a t.v. with no picture...I mean, that was their day, man, that was their day. And there's just nothing...no activity, no treatment, no plans for improvement...no...nothing.

DAVE: The only activity they may get to go to...may get to go to...if there's enough aides on the ward and so on, they may get to go to a dance, or they may get to go to a movie. They have dances twice a week, and movies...at a central auditorium usually once a week, and then sometimes on the wards...one building may get one movie a week, and not all patients can come around to see it at the same time.

OS: Let's talk again for a moment about admissions. When you come in for the first time, you go to something called "Admissions-Exit?"

ALL: Right.

OS: And from there you're usually assigned to some other place?

DAVE: If you're not discharged...you can be discharged after thirty days.

OS: But if you stay, you go on to one of these remotivation wards?

RON: Right.

OS: Do you usually go to I first? Have all the people in II been in I?

RON: Most of them.

OS: You indicated II was for more chronic patients...well, for patients who had been in long enough to be moved for reasons of space, or who had caused trouble...and Ron said you get very little treatment in II...do you get more treatment in Remotivation I than II?

MARY: No, not at all..

RON: She works in I.

OS: Well, who gets the treatment?

ALL: Well, that's just it...nobody...

DAVE: All right, they've got a couple of special programs...right off hand I can think

of three special programs they have set up. They've got a special program at the Lever Building; they have a psychologist there...they've got a pretty good program going. And they've got a program going at the Thompson Building...a token economy system...

OS: The patients earn tokens like money?

DAVE: They get tokens for doing certain tasks...

RON: It's like positive re-enforcement...if you comb your hair, you get a token; or if you ehlp clean up, you get a couple of tokens to buy candy and cigarettes...and it works, you know, pretty much...

MARY: They used it in one building where I was and it just worked great...people laying all over the floor at first, and now they're up and working...doing little jobs...

RON: But this sort of program is the exception...

DAVE: the hospital is convinced they should stay with the "medical model", you know...a lot of hospitals have gone beyond that...the doctors at the hospital, most of them are Cuban, and the patients don't understand what in the hell they're saying...the typical questions when the patient comes in are "Are you feeling well?" "Are you sleeping well?" "Are you eating well?" No more questions. And the patient is saying, "What the hell is he saying?" He can't understand the doctor...

RON: Yeah.."Who is the President?"

MARY: On admissions, heah...I was working at Crafts-Farrow and we had some--that was where older people came, fifty-five and older--and we'd have some ladies come in from the country who had maybe a third grade education...the doctor would ask them what the capitol of South Carolina was...and they didn't know...and he'd say "You don't know what the capitol of your own state is?"...and I'd try to explain to him that some people don't care, especially if they're out in the country and aren't educated...but he couldn't understand that; he wouldn't take that...he'd write down "Out of Contact."

OS: When you say doctors . . . do you mean psychiatrists?

MARY: No! These are medical doctors. At Crafts-Farrow, there were two psychiatrists.

OS: How many patients?

MARY: About twenty-five hundred. And I don't know how many at State.

RON: At State there's ten or twelve...and about thirty at Hall Institute.

OS: Where do they find these medical doctors?

RON: Well...at least half of them are Cuban refugees...they split when Castro took over...and they came over here...they can't get licensed right away...they start at about $15,000 a year...to them, it's a job and it's an easy job. That's about half of them...the other half are mostly I think retired doctors...they're old men, usually in their sixties.

MARY: There was one on the wards where I had been working...he'd had a heart attack last year and they'd always say "Go easy on him"...they'd turn in reports that he was way behind on his work, that he wouldn't see patients, they he wouldn't transfer them...we had one lady fall down and cut her head because she couldn't walk and he wouldn't transfer her to the proper place...but they said go easy on him because he's in poor health...well, hell, so are the patients...

OS: Are there private doctors in town who work there?

MARY: They have consultants...I found out a little bit about this talking to Doctor (an administrator at Crafts-Farrow)...I turned in a report on one of the consultants because he was terrible about patient treatment...terrible...he'd treat them like animals, and alot of them were scared of him...(the administrator) himself said, "We've had a lot of reports on this guy, and we know he's a little impatient, but we have a hard time getting consultants so we have to take what we can get"...and that's supposed to be "Healing With Concern?"

OS: Let me ask you this...suppose I'm the average patient...suppose an average patient comes in, middle-aged, black, from a lower income background...he comes in; he's a patient there...he's not particularly violent . . . he's being admitted because he's "out of contact," say...

DAVE: Probably mentally retarded...

OS: O.K....how often does this guy see a doctor, of any kind?

RON: Well, in admissions he'll see a doctor within two or three days after he's been there, and then maybe once a week...

OS: Well, how long...

RON: Now these are medical doctors, not psychiatrists.

OS: When does he see a psychiatrist?

RON: Probably never...unless he goes to one of the wards where they have some kind of psychiatric program set up.

OS: This isn't the rule, I gather.

RON: No. Most patients don't get into the programs.

OS: Well, let me ask you this...who has decided somewhere in this process that this man needs psychiatric...I hate to use that word if he's not getting it...treatment?

RON: Doctors out in the community...outside the hospital...M.D.s.

MARY: It takes the signature of two doctors, or a court order, or in an emergency situation, one doctor...

OS: But the patients are not routinely examined by psychiatrists when they're admitted?

RON: Oh, hell no.

OS: That may seem routine to you, but I have the feeling the general public would be surprised...

RON: Oh sure...the general public probably thinks there are psychiatrists just running their asses off out there.

OS: I thought so myself.

RON: The patients are occasionally sent to a doctor who does tests, you know, like the ink blot tests...testing and evaluation it's called...they have a testing and evaluation center...but its not the rule but the exception to go through testing and evaluation...if you're the average black patient that comes in, you'll be sent to one of the Remotivation I sections probably after thirty days...they'll put you on enough drugs to where you're...See, that's the thing..Drugs, drugs, god I've had guys on 400 milligrams of Thorazine four times a day...

OS: Four times a day?

MARY: Yeah...and they say the patients are "unmotivated."

DAVE: Chemotherapy...

OS: Chemotherapy's where they keep you tranquilized regularly?

RON: That's all it is, man...the whole hospital's that...as soon as a patient's ad-

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